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ABSTRACT

Campus issues and trends identified by college union and student activities administrators are considered. The major college issue is alcohol and its impact on the campus. Since all but eight states have adopted the 21 drinking age, there are many administrative concerns, including monitoring campus alcohol service and finding alternatives for pub income. Alcohol education efforts have increased, and local and university police are active in enforcing the drinking age. Students are highly oriented toward degree completion and employment, and are more difficult to attract to leadership positions and organized campus activities. While students are less interested in bowling and craft shops, they enjoy comedy, films, performing arts, videos, and impersonating popular performers. Sources of income for unions include the copy center, automatic teller machines, video game machines, pay phones, and computer lounges. There continues to be a trend toward fast-food franchises in the college union, and many unions have experienced declines in food service sales. Special projects to encourage private giving to the union are having success. Union management concerns include a shortage of physical facilities. (SW)

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Trend shifts evident on college campuses

Richard D. Blackburn

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When college union and student activities administrators are asked what the major campus issue is, one response towers above all others. It's alcohol—and its impact on the campus. Now that all but eight states have gone to the 21 drinking age, an expanded range of administrative worries has surfaced. The obvious ones are monitoring campus alcohol service, checking IDs, and finding alternatives for dwindling pub income. Colleges and universities have dramatically increased their alcohol education efforts, and some have gone beyond cajolery and warnings. Local and university police raids and strong disciplinary actions, especially against fraternities, are becoming more frequent.

The growing trend by courts to impose third-party liability in alcohol-related accidents is a serious concern. Although the issue of alcohol on campus is gaining the attention of the campus community, resulting in new policies and guidelines, there is not yet much evidence that all the education and policy tightening is having an impact. Major research indicates that between 80 and 90 percent of students on campuses drink alcoholic beverages, between 10 and 20 percent drink abusively, and that these figures have not changed in the last two years. What has changed is a lessening university tolerance for unacceptable behavior and policy violations—a clear change in the last few years—and increasing university attention to substance abuse education and assistance for abusers.

Though it is generally acknowledged that campus drug use, especially marijuana, has declined since the early '80s, the matter of chemical dependency remains. Substance testing programs for athletes are often controversial, and some university administrators say the campus cocaine problem is worse than most realize.

Non-smokers are gaining ground in the battle to snuff out cigarettes. Campus policies and state laws restricting smoking are appearing with increasing frequency, and many unions are enlarging their nonsmoking areas.

The emphasis has been reversed to an assumption of no smoking unless the area is designated for smoking. Some schools are developing proposals to ban cigarette sales on campus, reminiscent of similar campus reactions after the first surgeon general's report on smoking in 1964. University policies are starting to appear which prohibit smoking in the work place.

Campus issues

A small but nonetheless signif-

Alcohol is the transcendent campus issue. Bowling is struggling and so are craft shops. Students are career-oriented; volunteerism is not strong. Comedy and films are big, and so is lip-sync. Many unions are short on space. Fast-food contractors are no longer a campus oddity. Financial problems persist. The search for new revenue is intensifying, and there is increased sensitivity about competing with the private sector.

These are just a few of the messages emanating from college union and student activities professionals as we enter 1987. Information from meetings, campus visitations, and the regular flow of communications into the ACU-I Central Office have all been sources for this article. The incredible diversity of institutions, unions, and personnel guarantee that unanimity on any subject is lacking. Yet some things do stand out, some impressions are clear, and some subjects need airing.

TO TIPPLE OR NOT TO TIPPLE

IF YOU DRINK, BE A RESPONSIBLE DRINKER

icant group of students on most campuses continues to express concerns about South Africa and the college's position on divestment. Universities are dealing with shantytowns in a variety of ways, from quick removal to official expressions of support. UCLA and Oregon administrators negotiated contracts with shanty tenants outlining acceptable activities and a removal date.

Not new but building in intensity is the issue of tax-exempt organizations (colleges and universities) being charged with private sector competition. Bookstores and campus computer outlets receive most of the heat, and Illinois and Arizona have passed legislation restricting university retail sales.

The most recent development has been action by the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee to examine federal tax treatment of income-producing activities of tax-exempt organizations. A director of one large union said, "This is an area we will hear more about."

Good judgment and overt efforts by union officials to be involved with the local business community are important. Most college unions are very sensitive to the issue of unfair competition and extremely careful about starting new retail operations or delivering services off campus.

Some campus issues—like parking—will be there forever. And then there are the unanticipated responses, like the campus that lists "pencil sharpeners" as a major issue among students.

Finding funds

The persisting frustration of those charged with college union leadership is how to respond to the hot breath of fiscal exigencies while remaining true to the basic union purpose. In too many cases, this situation is traceable to diminishing institutional support and a conceptual shift of the union to "auxiliary" status, meaning "pay your own way."

Somehow, the historic primary role of the union as a campus community center, an important part of the educational program, key contributor to student development, and unifying force in the life of the college, has little importance to some top college officials and to state legislators and administrators. What *is* important is that more and more revenue be generated, and college union administrators are devoting inordinate attention to this exhortation.

One of the most rapidly developing sources of revenue is the copy center, usually involving a lease arrangement based upon volume. The Illini Union at the University of Illinois manages the copier contract for all campus machines, using a declining balance card program.

Automatic teller machines are practically standard fixtures in unions, and provide large incomes in some cases. The video boom has ignited videotape and VCR rentals. The Wisconsin Union has an interesting cooperative arrangement with a local purveyor who provides the tapes and playback units, reimburses the union for all staffing costs, and the union receives a percentage of rental proceeds. A major contributor to heavy building traffic in the Georgia Tech Student Center is a full-service post office with individual mail boxes for each of Tech's 12,000 students.

Video game machines appear to be pulling out of their nose dive of a couple of years ago, with reports that income is up over last year. UCLA and Washington State have had success with video game conversion kits, which change the face and style of the game for a few hundred dollars cost.

There are more reports of bowling lane cutbacks or closings, among them UCLA, Oregon, Idaho, Colorado School of Mines, and Oklahoma State. Indiana University of Pennsylvania reports that new pay phones, owned by the union, are a successful income producer.

The computer revolution has provided a new opportunity for student service and revenue generation. Erb Memorial Union at the Univer-

sity of Oregon has transformed a space formerly occupied by eight bowling lanes into a Computer Lounge. The heavily used lounge contains 35 personal computer stations, a desk-top publishing room, and other user services, with both hourly and term rates. A leased computer and software retail store complements the area. The University of Idaho has installed 36 computer stations where billiard tables had been, and Michigan State is making a similar conversion. The Ohio State Union reports an 88 percent use rate for its free microcomputer lab, which is open seven days a week.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville has opened a word processing center in the University Center and recently received a gift of eight DEC personal computers. This brings the total available for student use, at 5 cents a minute, to 29.

In spite of this current flurry of providing computer work space for students, union administrators are discussing whether this will be a lasting need and whether it will ever be a significant income producer.

Among the other successful revenue-generating services reported were: selling lottery tickets (British Columbia Institute of Technology), craftshop framing and matting service (University of Illinois at Chicago), computer-generated signs and posters (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), photo processing (Southern Methodist University), flower vendor (San Jose State University), candy store (Concord College), newspaper subscription sales (University of Minnesota), ticket sales (Florida State University), and fresh popcorn sales at the information desk (Kansas State University).

Grazing habits

One union director observed that many college students don't eat full meals—they graze! Perhaps this partially explains why many unions report declines in food service total sales in 1985–86.

The never-ending struggle to build food income continues, however, in many ways. Prepackaged food items are appealing to the on-the-move student, ranging from conventional salads, fruits, and sandwiches to Japanese sushi. Flavored seltzers, specialty coffees, and low cal sodas are in.

The everlasting hamburger is being challenged by turkey tenderloins, fish, chicken fillets, and the vegetable nut patty (Oregon). Stir fry to order, pasta, pizza by the slice, Italian breadsticks, taco salads, and Cajun food are ethnic favorites. Delis and large (expensive) sandwiches are doing well. Heavy soups, chowders, breakfast croissants stuffed with egg, cheese, and meat, sweet potato pie, Dove bars, fresh gourmet cookies, bagels with assorted cream cheese spreads, and chocolate-covered popcorn are other student favorites.

The trend toward fast-food franchises in the college union continues. A new food court at Michigan State, called One Union Square, features four different outlets—pizza, hamburger, deli, ice cream—with a common seating area. The new union at University of California–San Diego will similarly accommodate seven different franchises. The University of Illinois at Chicago Unions have laid off half of their full-time food service employees and have gone to a contract package for both fast-food and conventional food operations.

Past and present leaders

Special projects and programs to encourage private giving to the union are having good success. University and union board alumni are valuable sources of support. The Indiana Memorial Union constructed a 75th anniversary commemorative garden by raising $100,000 through the sale of signature bricks. The Michigan

Union is conducting a fund drive for a $160,000 plaza project, and the Wisconsin Union has launched a $500,000 drive for a theater program endowment fund. Wisconsin also received $140,000 from the estate of a person they never knew, who used to fish from the Union pier. Iowa State has partially financed a theater project and building renovations through private donations and a grant.

Comments from union and student activities staff indicate that students continue to be highly oriented toward getting that degree and joining the work force. Annual American Council on Education surveys confirm that. The share of students whose goal is "being well-off financially" increased from 43.8 percent to 70.9 percent over the last 20 years.

Students are more difficult to attract to leadership positions, and the overall success of organized campus activities seems to have ebbed. Unabated tuition increases and financial aid difficulties plague most students, and many union staff complain about problems in finding good student help, especially in food areas.

Entertainment

Comedy is the hottest act on campus, and comedians are appearing in a variety of formats, from "nooners" to nightclubs. UCLA presented a successful semester series called "The Many Faces of Humor," with a different comedian every Monday night. The large popular concert business appears to be one of increasing volatility, with ticket sales being slow, whether it's for new wave rock, older rock bands, or jazz.

Many schools are reporting increased interest in films, with concession sales bolstering income. One reason for union film program successes may be a general decline in competing campus film societies. X-rated film controversies have died down, but "Hail Mary" has precipitated religious protests on some campuses. Cult films are drawing full houses ("Rocky Horror Picture Show," "Pink Flamingos"), and sometimes controversy. Old black-and-white films are appealing to increasing numbers.

A number of unions are experiencing a resurgence of interest in the performing arts. Indiana University of Pennsylvania's artist series was oversubscribed; Pomona College has a successful Campus Cabaret producing small plays; Florida says student participation in performing arts is up 27 percent; concert/theater season ticket sales have increased significantly at East Carolina and Wisconsin; and all dance company events at San Jose State University have sold out.

Craft centers in most unions are experiencing declining use, and programs are being cut back and space dedicated to other purposes. An exception is the University of Oregon, where use has been substantially up two years in a row, after several declining years.

Video continues to offer expanding programmatic opportunities. Some unions have purchased video production equipment and are producing in-house promotional and training films and video greeting cards, and conducting cinematic competitions. Video dances are popular. Noon soaps continue to draw students (and staff) to union TV areas.

Student air or dry bands and lip-syncs (impersonating popular performers) are popular student programs. Some believe coffeehouses and big dances are making a comeback. Alcohol awareness has triggered increased efforts toward non-alcoholic programming, but notable results are limited. Off-campus pubs continue to reign as student social centers.

Many unions still present traditional madrigal dinners, often as a collaborative effort with music school personnel. Reports indicate, however, that madrigals are off somewhat from their popularity peak of a few years back. Some unions have reduced the number of nights, and a few have dropped the event.

Management

The debate on the pros and cons of corporate underwriting of campus programs continues. To deal with the issue in a more orderly fashion, many union governing or program bodies have developed statements of policy. Some object to certain types of product sponsors; most, however, prefer to handle cosponsorships on a case by case basis. The Oregon State student activities committee policy states that when the corporate underwriter promotes alcohol and/or tobacco products, a dollar amount, equal to 10 percent of the total corporate donation shall be placed in a university account for the sole purpose of providing abuse education. The topic of corporate sponsors was treated at length in the September 1986 issue of the ACU-I *Bulletin*.

High on the list of problems many college unions face is a shortage of physical facilities—a space crunch. While this is an encouraging indicator that unions are being used more heavily, solutions are difficult. A few campuses such as University of California–San Diego and Southern Methodist University are now building entire, new college union buildings. Some others are currently constructing major additions or renovations, such as a $5.4 million project at Purdue, $9 million at University of Iowa, $12.5 million at University of Texas–Arlington, $4 million at Trinity University, $6 million renovation at Miami University of Ohio, and a $6.5 million project at the Kansas Union. Leadership in remodeling facilities to improve the union's response to campus needs is a normal, ongoing part of a union administrator's responsibilities.

Most large college unions continue to be served well by the traditional organizational model, led by a director charged with complete responsibility for all program and operational functions. In midsize and small institutions, there are some significant shifts in administrative roles. A combined position, usually bearing the title of director of the union and student activities, has become very common, and can provide cohesive leadership to union operational units, student programs and campus activities.

Unfortunately, there is also a trend away from centralized concepts on many campuses. Fragmentation of responsibilities, with a variety of reporting lines, can be found under the roofs of many college unions. Sometimes this is because union staff members are not sufficiently qualified by experience or interest to assume the broad mix of business and student development functions in the total union.

There is a noticeably quickened pace of union director retirements; the generation who entered the field in the boom years of the 1950s is now retiring. As major union director positions are being filled, almost always by someone within the profession, there is a ripple effect of new vacancies in the field. College union and student activities professionals who are stepping into these positions are those who place a high priority on their own continuing training and professional development. Such an ongoing commitment to professional development is necessary for the vitality of the college union movement.

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